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# **The Expanding Soviet Military Presence in Indochina**

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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*SOV 86-10004CX*

*January 1986*

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# **The Expanding Soviet Military Presence in Indochina**

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

This paper was prepared by [redacted]  
Office of Soviet Analysis. It was coordinated with the  
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[redacted]

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## The Expanding Soviet Military Presence in Indochina

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### Key Judgments

*Information available as of 1 November 1985 was used in this report.*

Sino-Vietnamese hostilities have enabled Moscow to expand its military cooperation with Vietnam and improve its overall position in Indochina. Since China's 1979 attack on Vietnam, the Soviets' most tangible gain has been their access to Cam Ranh Bay, their only operational naval base outside the USSR. The Soviets' steady military buildup there has:

- Substantially increased their capabilities to monitor US and allied naval and air activity in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, and to threaten regional sea lines of communications, especially maritime traffic passing through the Strait of Malacca.
- Improved their capabilities to augment their naval strength in the Indian Ocean quickly in crises.
- Demonstrated support for Hanoi against China and established the USSR as a key player in regional security affairs.

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One of Moscow's main objectives is to increase its security in the Far East by developing a reliable regional partner to help it carry out its strategic encirclement of the Chinese. To this end, the Soviets are organizing, training, and equipping the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN). Soviet advisers, who now number about 2,500, and a massive infusion of Soviet weapons have helped Vietnam to modernize and expand its forces, especially those opposite China.

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Both Moscow and Hanoi have sent aid to Laos and Cambodia. The Vietnamese have sent troops, while the Soviets have provided the weapons and expertise necessary to upgrade the Lao and Cambodian armed forces. Hanoi wants to build up the fledgling Cambodian forces so that it can reduce its own military presence, thus removing an obstacle to improved relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Soviets, who also want improved relations with the non-Communist states, share this objective.

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By supporting Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia and domination of Laos, the Soviets have also been able to establish a military presence in the two countries. The estimated 500 Soviet advisers in Laos are especially active

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[redacted] Some 200 Soviets are also providing weapons and military training to the Cambodian ground, air, and naval forces. [redacted]

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Soviet military ties to Cambodia and Laos, however, have led to problems with Hanoi, which is determined to remain the dominating influence in Vientiane and especially in Phnom Penh. Moscow, for its part, is aware of the distrust and animosity the Lao and Khmer have for the Vietnamese and sees bilateral security relations with the two countries as a means of exerting leverage on the Vietnamese. We judge it unlikely, however, that the Soviets would jeopardize their gains in Vietnam, especially their base at Cam Ranh, by pushing too hard and fast to build influence in Hanoi's client states. [redacted]

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The Soviets probably calculate that their increased military involvement in Vietnam, especially along the Sino-Vietnamese border, their expanded naval presence in the South China Sea, and their diplomatic support for the Vietnamese serve as deterrents to large-scale Chinese military action against the Vietnamese. We cannot confidently predict whether the Soviets would intervene militarily in the event of a major Chinese attack on Vietnam. At a minimum, however, we believe that the Soviets would support their ally by stepping up military resupply efforts, providing additional intelligence assistance and more direct advisory support, diplomatic demarches, and possibly threatening military maneuvers on China's northern border. [redacted]

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Through the 1980s, we expect that the Soviets probably will:

- Maintain a relatively stable number of military advisers in Vietnam, as they concentrate on modernizing PAVN forces along the Sino-Vietnamese border.
- Increase the number of advisers in Laos and Cambodia, as they expand their role in upgrading the Lao and Khmer armed forces.

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- Continue to increase their use of Cam Ranh Bay. We predict that the most advanced ships and aircraft sent to the Soviet Far East will be assigned to the bases in the Far Eastern USSR, but that some of the ships and aircraft made surplus by the Pacific Fleet's ongoing modernization will be based at Cam Ranh.
- Count on their growing military capabilities at Cam Ranh—as contrasted with the uncertain future of US military bases in the Philippines—to strengthen the position of those groups in non-Communist Southeast Asia that are willing to distance their countries from the West, especially those that fear the United States might turn to them for bases.

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**Scope Note**

This paper traces the Soviet military presence in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos since the late 1970s. It describes the level and activities of Soviet military forces and advisers in these countries, and it addresses the strains in the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship stemming from the growing Soviet military presence in Indochina. In-depth analysis of larger issues, such as the influence of the Soviet presence on regional security problems or political and economic costs for the Soviets, is beyond its scope.

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**Major Events in Soviet Expansion in Indochina**

1975	April	North Vietnam's victory over the South.
1977	May	Lao Defense Minister Khamtai Siphandon visits Moscow.
1978	January-February July August November December	Deputy Defense Minister Pavlovskiy visits Laos. Vietnam joins Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CEMA). Soviets establish Military Advisory Group in Hanoi. Moscow and Hanoi sign treaty of friendship and cooperation. Vietnam invades Cambodia.
1979	February  March April	China invades Vietnam. First Soviet combat ship calls in Da Nang, Vietnam. First Soviet ship visits Cam Ranh. Soviet TU-95 (Bear D naval reconnaissance) makes first deployment to Da Nang.
1980		Soviets deploy the first TU-142 (Bear F antisubmarine warfare) to Da Nang. Soviet naval and air operations shift from Da Nang to Cam Ranh. First Soviet ships call at Cambodian port. <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%; margin-top: 5px;"></div>
1981		Soviets conduct first naval exercise (ASW) with the Vietnamese. Soviet-Vietnamese joint venture established to conduct offshore oil exploration.
1982	January-February	Soviet Chief of General Staff Ogarkov visits Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.
1983	May November-December	Cambodian Defense Minister Bou Thang visits the USSR. Soviets deploy first Badger (TU-16) aircraft to Cam Ranh.
1984	April May, June  December	First Soviet-Vietnamese naval amphibious exercise conducted. Vietnamese Defense Minister Gen. Van Tien Dung makes two visits to Moscow. Soviet Ground Forces Chief, Marshal Petrov, visits Vietnam. Soviets deploy MIG-23s to Cam Ranh.
1985	September October	Vietnamese Defense Minister Van Tien Dung visits Moscow. Lao Defense Minister Khamtai Siphandon visits Moscow. <div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 80px; height: 15px; vertical-align: middle;"></div>

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## The Expanding Soviet Military Presence in Indochina

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### The Evolving Relationship

Soviet military advisers have been in North Vietnam since the late 1950s. Influence over the Vietnamese military, however, was limited, and Soviet military advisers and aid were competing with China for influence in Hanoi, especially during the Vietnam war. Although Soviet military assistance was important in North Vietnam's victory over the South in 1975, the Soviets were not able to expand their military presence in Vietnam as a consequence of providing the aid.

The situation changed dramatically for the Soviets as Hanoi's relations with China and Cambodia deteriorated (see inset and foldout map, p.23). The Soviets, at Vietnam's request, signed a bilateral friendship treaty in early November 1978 and subsequently increased their military assistance to Vietnam. The Vietnamese, who undoubtedly hoped the treaty would deter a Chinese response to their invasion of Cambodia in December 1978, were rudely awakened by China's February 1979 incursion. Vietnam's subsequent decision to request substantial Soviet military advisory assistance and financial support for the invasion of Cambodia and domination of Laos allowed Moscow to establish an important military foothold in Southeast Asia.

### Cam Ranh Bay

By far the most tangible benefit for the Soviets in Vietnam is the use of the naval, air, and SIGINT facilities at Cam Ranh Bay. Soviet naval forces stationed at Cam Ranh are the largest single group outside the USSR's home waters and the Mediterranean. In addition to projecting Soviet military power in the South China Sea, where American power was once undisputed, Soviet access to Cam Ranh puts pressure on China. The base has also enabled the Soviets to:

- Substantially increase their capability to monitor US and allied naval and air activity in Southeast

and Southwest Asian waters and to threaten regional sea lines of communication, especially maritime traffic passing through the Strait of Malacca

- Augment their naval presence in the Indian Ocean more quickly in response to crises. 25X1

- Provide a visible demonstration of support for Hanoi against China and establish themselves as key players in regional security issues. 25X1

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Cam Ranh's features undoubtedly influenced the Soviets' decision to select it as their base in Vietnam. These include:

- One of the best deepwater harbors in the world and natural protection from surrounding peninsulas and islands.
- Isolation from any large town or commercial activity, which makes it easily secured.
- Facilities and buildings, remaining from its former use as an American military base, that the Soviets could build on and expand.
- Location along the transit lanes of the South China Sea. 25X1
- Location out of range of most of the Chinese Air Force. 25X1

### Advantages of the Soviet Presence at Cam Ranh for the Vietnamese

The growing Soviet presence at the base provides a visible sign of Moscow's support for its Vietnamese ally. It also serves as a deterrent against attacks from the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and especially the Chinese. China, Vietnam's predominant rival and the only Asian

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country with a navy powerful enough to challenge the Vietnamese, must now contend not only with a modernizing Vietnamese Navy, but also with a growing Soviet naval and air threat along its southern flank.

Moreover, Vietnam may calculate that Moscow's concern for its base at Cam Ranh will constrain Soviet leaders from dramatically improving relations

with Beijing. The Vietnamese—who have been nervous about Soviet intentions since Moscow and Beijing began their ministerial talks in October 1982—probably see the base as insurance that the Soviets will not abandon Vietnam in the event of improved Sino-Soviet relations.

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**Soviet Activities at Other Vietnamese Bases**

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Although there are rumors and occasional references to other Soviet bases in Vietnam, Cam Ranh is the Soviets' only operational military base. Soviets are present at Vietnamese naval and air facilities other than Cam Ranh, however. Soviet ships, for example, deliver to Haiphong ground force equipment used by PAVN (the People's Army of Vietnam) to defend the northern border. Most aircraft deliveries, including the MIG-21s destined for Laos and Cambodia, are made at Da Nang. In addition,

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Hanoi is still extremely sensitive about its sovereignty and has not permitted the Soviets exclusive use of Cam Ranh. [redacted] the Vietnamese continue to maintain a small contingent of naval forces there, including a helicopter school and some small surface ships. In addition, [redacted] they use one of the six piers at the base.

[redacted] the Vietnamese repair and overhaul Soviet naval auxiliaries and hydrographic research ships at Ho Chi Minh City. Soviet planes operating out of Cam Ranh occasionally also use other airfields [redacted]

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Vietnamese access to Soviet-controlled areas of the bases [redacted] however, is limited. [redacted]

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**The Soviet Military  
Advisory Role in Vietnam**

[redacted]

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The Vietnamese also have emphasized publicly that the Soviets are only allowed to "use" the naval and air facilities, describing the Soviet presence as a necessary deterrent to Chinese aggression and as a counterweight to American military bases in the Philippines.

[redacted] The estimated 2,500 advisers, specialists, and support personnel constitute the Soviets' third-largest MAG in the Third World.<sup>2</sup> The number and role of Soviet military advisers began to increase about 1977 and rose notably after the 1979 Chinese invasion (see figure 5). The Chinese invasion convinced the Vietnamese that China was a long-term threat. As a result, they made the major political decision to accept increased external involvement in their military affairs in exchange for the rapid buildup of more

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Soviet concern about Vietnamese nationalist sentiment could be a brake on further expansion of permanent naval facilities. Despite the large number of vessels deployed to Cam Ranh, the Soviets have not built extensive support facilities on shore. They have preferred to provide most logistics and housing from facilities afloat. This reluctance may stem from their concern that permanent facilities would be lost if Soviet-Vietnamese relations soured and Soviet access to Cam Ranh were denied, as well as from their experiences in Egypt and Somalia. Moreover, Vietnamese authorities may have restricted the number of permanent installations the Soviets are allowed. [redacted]

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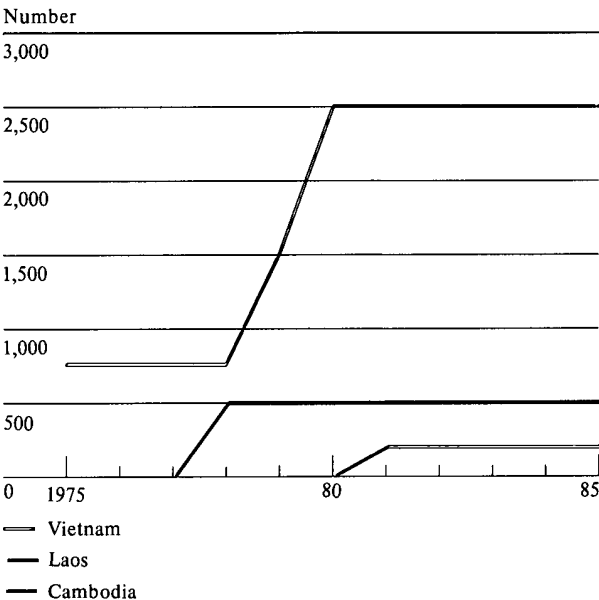
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Figure 5  
Soviet Military Advisers in  
Indochina, 1975-85



modern, conventional armed forces. Moreover, [redacted] the Chinese Army's familiarity with PAVN tactics made the PAVN more vulnerable. This vulnerability and the need to adapt combat tactics to accommodate the new Soviet weaponry were factors contributing to the Vietnamese decision to allow greater Soviet influence. [redacted]

Arms Deliveries

In the wake of the Chinese incursion, the Soviets and Vietnamese reportedly concluded an agreement to expedite the flow of arms, military equipment, and technical assistance, as well as to increase the size of the Soviet advisory mission (see figure 6). The highest level of military aid was sent immediately after the invasion when the USSR provided approximately \$1.8 billion worth of material. Since then, Soviet military aid has averaged \$800 million annually. The massive infusion of Soviet military assistance since 1979 has allowed the Vietnamese to modernize and expand

their forces, especially those opposite the Chinese border in northern Vietnam. [redacted]

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**Ground Forces.** The focus of the modernization effort has been on the ground forces, the dominant service in terms of size and political influence.<sup>3</sup> Soviet deliveries of ground force equipment have included T-54/55 tanks, armored personnel carriers, 122-mm D-30 howitzers, 122-mm D-74 field artillery, as well as engineering and river-crossing vehicles [redacted]

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extensive Soviet influence on the development of selected combat units. [redacted]

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[redacted] The overall result of Soviet help has been a significant upgrade in the capabilities of the PAVN ground forces since 1979. [redacted]

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**Air and Air Defense Forces.** Soviet aid has enabled the Vietnamese Air Force to develop an effective, integrated air defense system and improved ground support capabilities. The Soviets have sent substantial numbers of MIG-21/Fishbeds, which can match any fighter now flown by the Chinese. In addition, the Vietnamese air defense system incorporates two types of surface-to-air missiles—SA-2s and SA-3s. [redacted]

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**Naval Forces.** The Soviets are also helping the Vietnamese to improve their naval forces. [redacted]

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[redacted] The recent deliveries of [redacted] Soviet ships increase Vietnam's ability to defend its territorial waters and the Spratly Islands. [redacted]

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<sup>3</sup> The modernization program began in the early-to-mid-1970s. The Soviets provided impetus through equipment deliveries and advisory assistance. [redacted]

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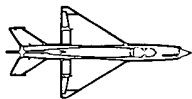



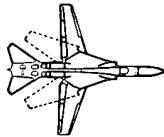
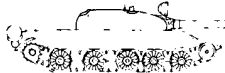
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**Figure 6**  
**Major Soviet Weapons Sent to Vietnam Since 1979**

		Description	Year Operational
Air Defense			
MIG-21 Fishbed J/N		Low-level tactical air defense fighter. Matches any fighter currently flown by the Chinese. Range of 400 kilometers.	1968-73
Ground Forces			
T-54		Primary tank used by PAVN. Its main armament is a 100-mm gun.	1949-58
T-55			
SS-1 Scud B		A single-stage, surface-to-surface missile system having a 300-km range.	1961
Navy			
Petya I/II		A shallow-sea antisubmarine (ASW) light frigate equipped with torpedos and depth charges.	1960-67
Weapons Likely To Be Delivered to Vietnam			
MIG-23 Flogger B/G		Principal Soviet tactical aircraft. Intended primarily for the air-intercept role but can have a secondary mission of ground attack.	1972-78
T-62		Improved tank that has replaced T-54/55 in Warsaw Pact forces. Significant numbers have been exported to other Third World countries.	1961

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**Advisers**25X1  
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The Soviets seized the chance to expand their military role in Vietnam, a country whose war-fighting capabilities have been demonstrated. Building up the Vietnamese forces provided an excellent opportunity to tie down many Chinese units. Hanoi's interest in fostering closer military ties must have seemed especially attractive after years of Sino-Soviet competition for influence in Vietnam. In addition, having their advisers work closely with PAVN enabled the Soviets to acquire valuable information on Chinese military capabilities and tactics. [REDACTED]

The changes in Soviet military advisory practices following the Sino-Vietnamese border war are illustrated by the expansion of the advisory mission to the Vietnamese Air Force (VAF). [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Soviet military advisers are involved in almost every aspect of the operations of the military unit or agency to which they are assigned—a practice followed in other large Soviet MAGs such as those in Cuba and Ethiopia. Their objective is to help turn PAVN into a modern, regular army by helping the Vietnamese reorganize and train in the Soviet manner, as well as integrate Soviet-provided equipment. [REDACTED]

Soviet advisers probably also try to prevent the Vietnamese from squandering the military aid the way they have often done with Soviet economic aid. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets' influence within PAVN has grown substantially as a result of the extensive military aid and technical expertise they have provided. The Vietnamese are now much more militarily dependent upon the Soviets; their military capabilities would be hurt considerably if the Soviets discontinued their aid. [REDACTED]

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At the same time, the Soviets have not found it necessary to provide the PAVN with their most sophisticated weaponry to sustain this leverage. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] We believe Moscow will eventually provide MIG-23s to Vietnam. The Soviets have already given them to other socialist allies—including Cuba, North Korea, and Angola—and Hanoi probably is sensitive that Vietnam is the only important ally that has not received an aircraft that has become something of a status symbol in the Third World. [REDACTED]

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**Military Exercises**

[redacted]

and the Philippines have made conflicting claims. This region is considered potentially rich in natural resources, especially oil. If the Soviets and the Vietnamese choose to drill for oil there, they will want to be in a position to defend themselves from a possible Chinese attack and to deter the ASEAN countries from seriously challenging the claim. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

**Impact on Training**  
Soviet advisers, [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted] have helped to convert most PAVN officer training programs to Soviet curriculums. Their overall objective probably is to mold a new generation of PAVN military leaders who are amenable to Soviet tactics and training. [redacted]

The modernization of the Vietnamese Navy will enhance Hanoi's ability to defend the contested Spratly Islands where China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia,

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[redacted] Hanoi's insistence upon defining the political or "military art" dimension of PAVN's training not only distinguishes it from Soviet Warsaw Pact allies and other key Soviet military clients such as Ethiopia—where Soviet influence extends over party matters as well—but also reflects the importance the Vietnamese attach to their own military history and experience. [redacted]

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#### **Influence on Military Doctrine**

Having defeated the French and Americans in two important Indochinese wars and having successfully withstood the 1979 Chinese incursion, the Vietnamese are proud of their military history. Vietnamese leaders believe the PAVN officers, who have extensive combat experience, are highly competent but acknowledge that their technical skills and knowledge of sophisticated weaponry are limited. The Vietnamese have always borrowed selectively from foreign military doctrines, including, in recent years, Soviet doctrine. [redacted]

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There is, however, at least some resentment in Vietnam about Soviet influence on PAVN training. The quality of training in the USSR has been questioned. [redacted] Vietnamese students have complained that instructors place greater importance on a "pro-Soviet outlook" than on military competence. [redacted]

The Vietnamese are tailoring Soviet military practices to fit PAVN's specific needs. They recognize that PAVN has gained from Soviet military expertise, but they believe they cannot adopt foreign ideas without analyzing them first. Defense Minister Van Tien Dung, in December 1984, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary celebration of the founding of PAVN, stated that PAVN "has benefited greatly from the experience and advanced knowledge of the Soviets." General Dung emphasized, though, that Vietnamese military science, "due to the specific conditions and situation of the revolution . . . must successfully resolve *by itself* [italics added] all problems arising in the people's lives from their hard struggle." [redacted]

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The Vietnamese have accepted the Soviet military advisers at the armed forces academies, [redacted]

In an article in the December 1984 *Tap Chi Cong San*, the Vietnamese Communist Party theoretical journal, Lt. Gen. Bui Phung discussed the importance of integrating Soviet aid into PAVN's rear services. Although acknowledging the significance of aid, he did not suggest the restructuring of Vietnamese forces

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along Soviet lines. Instead, he stressed that PAVN must decide how best to use Soviet aid to suit its specific needs:

*The aid from the Soviet Union and the socialist countries has been very effective. It has made us better able to supply advanced technical equipment and materials to troops in our rear services. However, this aid demands that we increase our research, that we study and learn the properties and uses of this equipment in order to maintain and utilize it in a manner consistent with climatic and geographical conditions on the battlefield in our country and the circumstances under which our troops live and fight.*

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#### The One-Commander System

Soviet advisers assigned to PAVN, nonetheless, have apparently been successful in persuading the Vietnamese leadership to adopt certain far-reaching changes in their command structure. The most important example is the Vietnamese decision to adopt the one-commander model practiced by the Soviets. In this system, the senior military commander takes responsibility for both command and political decisions in his unit. Previously, the Vietnamese had adopted the Chinese dual-command system where military and political officers of equivalent ranks thrashed out command decisions.<sup>6</sup>

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#### Clashes at the Working Level

Despite the close Soviet-Vietnamese military relationship, differences in outlook sometimes lead to problems. many PAVN officials respect Soviet military expertise but believe the Soviets do not sufficiently understand the special circumstances facing Vietnam. For example, younger PAVN officers—the generation the Soviets are trying to influence—have expressed doubts about the suitability of Soviet-type motorized divisions in the Vietnamese environment. Their concerns include an inadequate road network, impassable jungle and mountain areas, and the PAVN soldiers' lack of technical sophistication. Although PAVN forces are being modernized the process is probably hindered by skepticism among the PAVN rank and file. Apparently, the Vietnamese often passively resist Soviet advice, by voicing agreement but taking no action to implement it.

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<sup>6</sup> In the past, the Soviets themselves have had problems sorting out the relationship between military and political officers. Tensions were greatest from the 1920s until the middle of World War II when the *zampolit* (political officers) were subordinated to the military commander on several occasions, only to be reinstated again on equal footing. This even included the authority to cosign operational orders. Since 1942, however, the one-commander principle has prevailed in the Soviet military.

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## ... And Frictions

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although willing to support Vietnam's dominant role in Laos and Cambodia, the Soviets are nevertheless resolved to maintain their own independent presence in both countries. They have committed substantial resources to establishing their foothold in Indochina and want to be in a position to discourage or prevent Hanoi from evicting them. They are reportedly aware of the distrust and animosity the Lao and Cambodians have for the Vietnamese and are trying to develop separate links with each country as a means of exerting some leverage on the Vietnamese.

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Moscow's apparent objective in Laos and Cambodia is to have as high a profile as possible without offending the Vietnamese. The Soviets are unlikely to jeopardize their strategic gains in Vietnam, especially their base at Cam Ranh, by pushing too hard and fast to build up their influence in Vietnam's client states, particularly at Hanoi's expense. They probably learned a lesson in 1981 when the Vietnamese ousted Pen Sovan—the first Khmer leader installed by Hanoi—after the invasion of Cambodia. While the precise reasons for Pen Sovan's removal are unclear, one factor

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was Hanoi's suspicion of Pen Sovan's closeness to the Soviets.

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25X1**The Soviet Advisory Role in Laos and Cambodia****Moscow's and Hanoi's Shared Objectives . . .**

The Soviets have provided the military, economic, and advisory aid necessary for Vietnam's continued domination of Laos and occupation of Cambodia. The Soviet military advisory presence followed in the wake of PAVN troops—40,000 to 50,000 in control of Laos since 1975 and 140,000 occupying Cambodia since late 1978. By supporting Vietnam's longstanding objectives in Indochina, Moscow gains favor in Hanoi and forestalls Beijing's influence.

The security relationship that Moscow and Hanoi have worked out is complementary. The Vietnamese furnish the manpower necessary to stabilize the situation in its client states (that is, keeping out the Chinese), and the Soviets provide the financial resources and military and technical expertise for upgrading the armed forces of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Moreover, both Hanoi and Moscow apparently agree that there should be three separate states in Indochina, and the Vietnamese probably welcome Moscow's long-term economic and military commitments to Vientiane and Phnom Penh, which support the Lao Communist government and buttress the besieged Heng Samrin regime.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The Chinese have long held that the Vietnamese would like to subsume both Laos and Cambodia into one entity, an Indochina Federation, assuming the role the French had in the 19th century as colonizers. It appears Hanoi prefers to exert suzerainty over Laos and Cambodia by establishing puppet governments in the respective capitals, thus maintaining the facade of an independent Laos and Cambodia.

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the Vietnamese are not totally happy with the expanding Soviet security role in the other two states. The Vietnamese, whose political advisers dominate the decisionmaking process in Laos and Cambodia, are in a position to restrict the contact the Lao and Khmer have with the Soviets.

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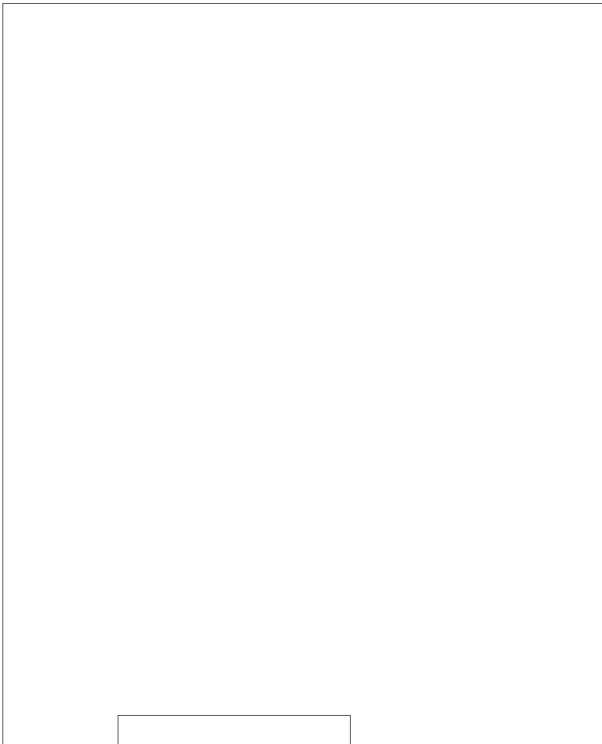
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**Ground Forces and Logistics.** Soviet efforts to upgrade the Cambodian ground, naval, and air forces dovetail with Hanoi's objective of improving Phnom Penh's armed forces so that it can gradually reduce its own military presence in Cambodia. Because the Vietnamese need Soviet military advisers to maintain the weaponry the USSR has sent, the Soviets have continuing opportunities to exert influence in Cambodian military affairs. Military training in the USSR gives the Soviets another opportunity to cultivate Cambodian military personnel.



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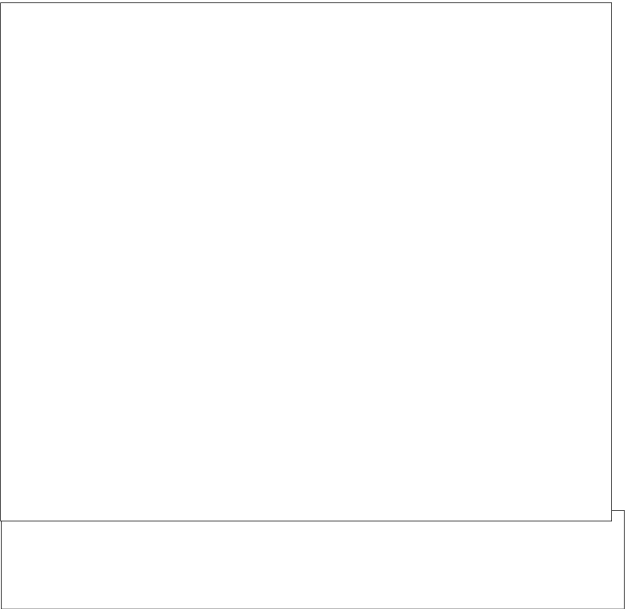
**The Soviet Military Presence in Cambodia**

The Soviets have played a key role in supporting the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia for the past seven years. They have given diplomatic and media support to their ally, and, without Moscow's extensive economic aid of an estimated \$1 billion annually, it is unlikely that Hanoi, given the dismal state of the economy, would be in a position to sustain the costly occupation of Cambodia. Soviet military materiel and advisory assistance to Vietnam have enhanced Hanoi's position in Cambodia as well.



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Moscow, knowing that Vietnamese actions against the Cambodian resistance in the early spring of 1984 triggered a strong military response from China in April and May, nevertheless provided considerable military and political backing to Vietnam before and during Hanoi's 1984-85 dry-season offensive. Soviet Ground Forces Chief, Marshal Petrov, who arrived in Vietnam on 20 December 1984 to attend the Vietnamese 40th armed forces anniversary, was the highest ranking Soviet military visitor to Indochina since Chief of Staff Ogarkov visited Hanoi in 1982. Vietnam's planned attacks on the resistance forces were



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we do not expect that the Soviets will soon establish a major support facility in Cambodia for their own use.

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At the same time [redacted] 25X1

since the beginning of 1985, the Soviets have delivered several small naval craft to the Cambodians. The Soviets might, therefore, help the Cambodians to upgrade at least one of the naval facilities to accommodate their fledgling navy. [redacted]

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Phsar Ream is probably the better candidate for upgrading. Kampong Saom is the only deepwater port in Cambodia, but it is also more congested with merchant shipping. Phsar Ream is more isolated, and its facilities are adequate for the small craft the Soviets are providing. Soviet ships occasionally call at the facility to show the flag in the Gulf of Thailand, and Soviet vessels could also dock at Phsar Ream for replenishing food and water. [redacted]

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**Air Force.** Soviet efforts to establish a Cambodian air force reportedly have been under way since at least 1981, [redacted]

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The deployment of MIG-21s to Cambodia, [redacted] 25X1  
[redacted] would 25X1

introduce a new tactical air capability that could be used against Khmer guerrilla forces in Cambodia.

Thailand would also face a potential threat [redacted] 25X1  
[redacted] along 25X1

the Cambodian border. While we believe a fledgling Cambodian air force would present only a modest 25X1

military threat to Thailand, the psychological impact might be greater. Deployments of MIG-21s to Cam- 25X1K1

bodia would intensify Thai security concerns, already 25X1

high following Vietnam's aggressive dry-season campaign against Cambodian resistance groups and numerous incursions into Thailand. [redacted] 25X1

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**Soviet Aid to Laos**

*Soviet deliveries to Laos since 1979 include small arms, artillery pieces, armored vehicles, patrol boats, communications equipment, radar, and SA-3 mis-*

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*Soviet civilian specialists have also worked on projects that build up the country's infrastructure and have security implications. These projects include the construction of roads, fuel pipelines, hospitals and schools, and mining, and mapmaking.*

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**The Soviet Military Advisory Group in Laos**

The Soviets have had an advisory presence in Laos since the Communist takeover in 1975.

the Soviets made even more significant inroads in Laos after 1978, following the deterioration of Lao-Chinese relations, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in late 1978, and the withdrawal of Chinese roadbuilding units from Laos in early 1979. Since signing a defense agreement with Laos in 1978, the Soviets have taken the lead in modernizing the Lao People's Army (LPA) by turning a largely guerilla army into a fledgling conventional military force,

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The Soviets also have been instrumental in developing the small but growing Lao Air Force. The Soviets supply the aircraft, help train the pilots, and work with Lao technicians to maintain the planes.

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We believe the Soviets' major goal is to upgrade the fighting capability of the LPA through arms deliveries, advisory assistance, training, and reorganization

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**Outlook****Possible Soviet Responses to Another Chinese Attack**

The extensive aid the Soviets have given their Indo-Chinese allies since 1979, as well as the Soviet base at Cam Ranh, raises the question of how the Soviets would respond to another large-scale Chinese attack on Vietnam. Soviet leaders probably believe that improvements in Vietnamese military capabilities since 1979 will deter the Chinese from military activities more serious than artillery exchanges along the Sino-Vietnamese border or a naval show of force in the South China Sea. The 1979 Chinese incursion into Vietnam was costly enough; a second "lesson" almost certainly would be even more damaging, given the Vietnamese buildup. Chinese decisionmakers would also have to consider both the Soviet-assisted buildup of the Vietnamese Navy and the Soviet naval and air forces at Cam Ranh. [ ]

At the same time, the Soviets no doubt realize that their expanded military presence in Vietnam raises the chances of their direct involvement should such a conflict occur. The Soviets would undoubtedly try to stay out of the conflict as long as they believed the Vietnamese could handle it. Indeed, Moscow probably has not given direct guarantees to come to Hanoi's assistance in the event of a Chinese attack. Both parties probably find it beneficial to leave the nature of any Soviet response vague; Hanoi for fear the Soviets would say no, Moscow for fear of having to refuse a commitment. Moreover, both Hanoi and Moscow probably see advantages to Chinese uncertainty over the likelihood and nature of Soviet military responses. [ ]

A Chinese attack that seriously threatened Vietnam would confront the Soviets with a dilemma. It would put at risk the USSR's recently won strategic position in Southeast Asia. At the same time, a decisive Soviet military intervention in a land war in Southeast Asia would not only be logistically difficult to support, but also could develop into a major Sino-Soviet conflict on several fronts. We cannot confidently predict how either the Soviets or the Chinese would behave in a regional crisis, but we judge that both would want to avoid a major escalation. [ ]

There are, of course, a number of actions, short of direct intervention, by which the Soviets could weigh in on Vietnam's side. These include stepped-up military resupply, provision of intelligence support and more direct advisory assistance, diplomatic demarches, and, perhaps, the threat of military maneuvers on China's northern borders. Almost certainly, a regional crisis would halt present efforts to improve Sino-Soviet relations. [ ]

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**Projected Advisory Role**

We believe the Soviet military advisory presence in Vietnam has stabilized. The Soviets will continue to work closely with PAVN along the Sino-Vietnamese border, helping the Vietnamese to improve their tactics, absorb modern equipment, and upgrade communications capabilities. The slow pace of PAVN modernization and reorganization along Soviet lines [ ]

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[ ] indicates the Soviet advisory presence will be required for some time. The Soviets also have a vested interest in remaining in Vietnam to ensure that their influence in the country remains intact. [ ]

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The Soviets' presence in Laos and Cambodia is likely to increase as their military advisory skills and weapons are needed to build up the Lao and Cambodian armed forces. The military advisory presence could double within the next five years. [ ]

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**The Soviets' Future Use of Cam Ranh**

We believe the Soviet buildup at Cam Ranh will continue at a measured pace through the 1980s. We do not expect a change in Moscow's priority of assigning its most advanced ships and aircraft to the defense of the Soviet Far East. At the same time, as the Pacific Fleet grows, the Soviets will have additional combatants and aircraft available for out-of-area operations, such as those at Cam Ranh. The gradual growth at the base is thus in part a result of the ongoing expansion and modernization of the Soviet

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Pacific Fleet. In addition, the Soviets probably are constrained by political factors such as Vietnamese sensitivities over sovereignty. [ ]

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The ships the Soviets are most likely to deploy through the 1980s include additional diesel and nuclear-powered attack submarines—possibly equipped with new long-range cruise missiles—and small missile-armed combatants. The deployment of mobile surface-to-surface coastal defense missiles would be a logical next step. [ ]

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[ ] The Soviets may eventually add more air defense equipment such as surface-to-air missiles to strengthen the overall air defense capabilities at Cam Ranh. [ ]

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The stronger naval force backed up by the air regiment would improve the USSR's ability to conduct distant area missions and interdict unescorted merchant shipping and lightly defended convoys in the South China Sea. It would also increase the potential threat to Western naval ships in the area, but probably would not have sufficient strength to defeat US carrier battle groups. [ ]

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In recent years, however, the Soviets have been improving existing support facilities, building new ones, and increasing the amount of ground support equipment at Cam Ranh Airfield. This activity suggests the Soviets eventually will deploy additional aircraft—probably more Badgers—to Cam Ranh. [ ]

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The construction at the airfield also raises the possibility that the USSR may send Backfire bombers—the aircraft that will replace the Badger in Soviet Naval Aviation—to Vietnam. This deployment would signify an important departure from the gradual Soviet buildup at Cam Ranh. The Backfire is faster than the Badger, carries better antiship missiles, and has more complete and sophisticated jamming capabilities. Its deployment to Vietnam would also widen the Soviet military threat to the region because its greater combat radius would enable it to strike targets as far away as Australia and well into the Pacific Basin. [ ]

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We believe, however, that requirements to perform higher priority missions from Soviet territory and the relatively slow pace at which Backfires are being introduced into Soviet Naval Aviation make their permanent basing in Cam Ranh unlikely over the next few years. The Soviets, nonetheless, could at any time make temporary deployments. [ ]

Over the longer term, the Soviets probably calculate that their growing military capabilities at Cam Ranh—as contrasted with the uncertain future of US military bases in the Philippines—will strengthen the position of those groups within non-Communist Southeast Asia that are willing to distance their countries from the West, especially those countries that fear the United States might turn to them for bases. [ ]

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